

Missouri River Spring Rise Facilitated Process Concludes

*Missouri River Recovery Implementation Committee (MRRIC)
to address long term management of the river.*

The Missouri River Spring Rise Facilitated Process concluded on August 19, 2005, with the fourth and final meeting of the Missouri River Spring Rise Plenary Group in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The Plenary Group served as the central deliberating body for the Spring Rise Facilitated Process. It used a collaborative approach to developing consensus-based recommendations for a Spring Rise to be undertaken by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to comply with the 2003 Amended Biological Opinion published by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

Governor M. Michael Rounds, of South Dakota, opened the Plenary Session by asking the group to set aside their differences and reach a compromise that would serve all river interests. At the meeting, the Plenary Group discussed the analyses conducted by the Technical Working Groups. It considered the potential impacts on the different stakeholders throughout the Basin of several different approaches to conducting a possible Spring Rise, previously identified by the Group. Of special concern were how to address potential impacts resulting from different upper basin reservoir levels and potential effects of different water flow rates on flood risks to downstream agricultural lands, as well as to navigation. Although tentative compromise recommendations appeared possible on some issues, no agreement was reached by the end of the day on a final comprehensive set of recommendations. Therefore, no agreed upon recommendations regarding specific criteria for conducting a Spring Rise criteria were forwarded to USACE and USFWS by the Plenary Group. Rather, the Plenary Group provided the agencies with information identifying areas of potential agreement, and those areas of continuing disagreement, as well as the issues that needed greater exploration and inquiry.

The fourth meeting of the Plenary Group marked the end of an intensive three-month effort to collaboratively develop consensus-based recommendations to USACE and USFWS regarding how to conduct a Spring Rise that would both benefit the endangered pallid sturgeon and minimize undesirable impacts on Basin stakeholders. The Missouri River Spring Rise Plenary Group was made up of approximately 50 representatives of a wide range of stakeholder interests from throughout the Basin, as well as federal agencies, tribes, and states. The Plenary Group's first meeting was held June 1-2 in St. Joseph, Missouri. The second meeting was held June 29-30 in Bismarck, North Dakota. The third session was held July 26-28 in Omaha, Nebraska. In addition, Technical Working Group meetings were held in between the Plenary Group sessions.

The Missouri River Spring Rise Facilitated Process represents the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' initial effort to systematically engage Basin stakeholders in a more collaborative approach to adaptively manage the operation of the Missouri River in a

manner that will lead to the eventual recovery of endangered species and restoration of the Missouri River ecosystem, while minimizing undesired impacts on Basin stakeholders. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will take the information generated by the Plenary Group process in developing its approach to conducting a Spring Rise, which will be incorporated into its Draft 2006 Annual Operating Plan, to be released for public comment sometime in October.

The next phase of continuing collaborative engagement with Basin stakeholders will focus on establishing a Missouri River Recovery Implementation Committee (MRRIC) to help develop and coordinate implementation of a long-term comprehensive Missouri River Recovery Implementation Plan (MRRIP). Preliminary efforts to work with interested stakeholders in designing the MRRIC so that it will be effective in developing long-term solutions for the Basin will begin as soon as possible. It is anticipated that the MRRIC will take up some of the unresolved issues from the recently completed Spring Rise Facilitated Plenary Group Process that require more long-term approaches and solutions. Please continue to check the project website at <http://missouririver.ecr.gov> for current developments, including how you can continue to be involved.